



## Creating Policy, Systems, Environmental Change: Success Story and Lessons Learned

### Title

YO! Mateo Nutrition Soldiers Campaign

### Intervention Summary

In South San Francisco 47% of children are overweight or obese. San Mateo County LHD sub-grantee Youth Leadership Institute (YLI) partnered with Parkway Heights Middle School in South San Francisco to engage youth in nutrition education and obesity prevention. YO! Mateo Nutrition Soldiers consisted of 25 students from the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade class. The Nutrition Soldiers received training to conduct a youth-led action research project to increase the access of healthy food options in their school environment. They then developed and implemented 100 surveys to Parkway Heights Middle School Children. Through the surveys they found 90% of students wanted a yogurt bar and assessed that adding a yogurt bar to their breakfast program was achievable. The Nutrition Soldiers presented their Healthy Food key findings and recommendations to 110 community staff and peers that represented the San Mateo County SNAP-Ed population. As a result of the campaign:

- 1) The lunch program has more variety of food options that are nutritious and preferred by the students
- 2) South San Francisco Unified School District (SSFUSD) Nutrition Services has improved packaging of meals for better taste and quality
- 3) Yogurt bar was implemented during school breakfast program

Parkway Heights Middle School faculty were moved by the presentation and were inspired by the Nutrition Soldier's to implement suggested changes. Quotes from the faculty students include:

Principal Marco Lopez: "Healthy eating habits are established at home and need to be reinforced at school. Establishing healthy school wide initiatives can have a positive impact on social emotional, academic success, and can ultimately motivate students to participate in programs as sports, student council, etc....Parkway's partnership with YLI has absolutely been valuable for changing the school's food environment and attitudes of youth. We are continuing our collaboration for 2015-16 school year."

Teacher Sharon Celillo: "Nutrition is work. Learning about food and nutrition helps teens make smarter food choices as they gain independence and start making decisions for themselves and younger siblings. Our partnership with YLI was a valuable experience we will definitely partner up again"

Cielita Capistrano, 8<sup>th</sup> grade Parkway Heights Middle School Student: "The Youth Leadership Institute has helped us tremendously to achieve what we have been working so hard for, which was an alternative breakfast option at our school. We successfully established a yogurt bar, which we advocated for because of the benefits. We learned many skills to achieve this, which were surveying the school, presenting to peers and faculty members, and speaking to South San Francisco Unified School District Nutrition Services. Youth Leadership Institute gave us something we can be proud of and will affect future students coming into our school."

## **Description of Barriers Encountered and Identified or Proposed Solutions Future Directions/Sustainable Success**

San Mateo County LHD and the Youth Leadership Institute initially faced challenges partnering with the SSFUSD nutrition services due to staffing transitions. Several taste test were rescheduled and/or cancelled which made it difficult to initiate the project. YLI staff persisted and maintained relationships with the SSFUSD nutrition services staff. In addition, they worked with the students from the leadership class to teach them the skills to effectively communicate with those in power and influence change.

Moving forward, our FFY16 work plan includes a multi-intervention approach. YLI will continue with their efforts to engage youth in nutrition education and obesity prevention through their leadership class. In addition, we have partnered with Parkway Heights Middle School to incorporate nutrition education and will be providing nutrition education during science classes. These complimentary activities will help achieve our broader outcome of improving access to healthy foods within these communities.



## Contact information about this Narrative

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